

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING

Blacksburg's Home for the Future

GOAL

To promote the organization and enhancement of neighborhoods, and to provide the opportunity for comfortable and well-maintained housing for all citizens.

BACKGROUND

Description

The relationship between quality of life, citizen participation, and public policy is complex. The most effective form of citizen participation has historically been the grassroots movement against a perceived threat to a community's quality of life. Similarly, public policy has historically generated public involvement only during controversial land use or policy changes. Public policy has rarely been designed to create a forum that facilitates a permanent dialogue between established grassroots organizations, or to encourage the development of new organizations. The tendency towards "crisis-only" communication is changing with the need to gather additional and continuous input from residents, and to provide feedback at the neighborhood level in response to their needs.

Few events affect an individual more directly than the activities and conditions present within their neighborhood. Residents must effectively participate and work cooperatively with government representatives to address pertinent issues and to have a positive and lasting impact on their quality of life. A neighborhood organization is an effective tool that citizens can use to participate with government to positively affect their neighborhoods. These organizations provide opportunities for residents to interact more frequently with their neighbors, and for businesses to build alliances that better focus their efforts.

NEIGHBORHOOD ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM (NEP)

The town is presented with many issues rooted in the disparities and tension that can result from an eclectic mix of people, housing, and living styles. An increasing number of students combined with a low vacancy rate in multi-family dwellings correspond to the proliferation of rental properties within neighborhoods. This phenomenon has increased contact between student and non-student residents and results in more frequent conflicts. Historically, the stability in the

effected neighborhood decreases as building maintenance declines and public nuisances escalate.

In 1998 Town Council adopted a strategic goal to respond to these growing concerns regarding the quality of life, appearance, and condition of properties within low-density, single-family neighborhoods. A task force consisting of property managers, neighborhood residents and staff was appointed to research and recommend program elements that would address these concerns. The Neighborhood Enhancement Program (NEP) was enacted in July 1999 as a result of the task force recommendations. The program seeks to proactively educate citizens on quality of life issues and to preserve neighborhood stability through increased communication, coordination, citizen involvement, neighborhood interaction and problem solving, and to encourage a sense of stewardship among residents. The NEP was also created as a method to increase the town's accountability with residents and to ensure that laws and codes are properly enforced. Every Town department is involved with this program to assist in addressing neighborhood issues. The program consists of three mutually supporting initiatives: Neighborhood Planning, Code Enforcement, and Rental Permitting. Each of these initiatives has separate objectives with the unified goal of recognizing the health, safety, and welfare of Town citizens.

Neighborhood Planning

Improving social interaction within neighborhoods, engaging meaningful dialogues, and encouraging involvement in local government is the main goal of the Neighborhood Planning initiative. The majority of neighborhoods were either inactive or crisis-driven organizations prior to implementing this initiative. Most of the active neighborhoods were built around homeowners associations and many of the most threatened neighborhoods did not have any organization. Neighborhood planning provides the foundation for many neighborhoods to begin organizing, to create stronger community bonds and to begin a permanent dialogue with Town officials.

There are 24 neighborhood planning areas in Blacksburg (Figure NP-2). The neighborhoods contain a variety of land uses and range from rural-agricultural areas to high-density housing. The neighborhood boundaries are determined by residents and are based on areas that share similar issues and visions.



***Figure NP-1, Glade-Westover
Neighborhood***

Neighborhood planning is designed to be an inclusive process that involves citizens, local stakeholders, Town departments, community organizations, businesses, and other appropriate groups. This provides a forum for citizens to take a proactive role in planning and problem solving to effectively address some of the most difficult issues, such as traffic, noise, and litter. This forum also offers an opportunity for residents to clarify their needs and vision, as well as to receive information about Town services and programs. This interaction with the neighborhood increases the town's responsiveness in dealing with issues and promotes accountability for citizen concerns.

Neighborhoods also have the opportunity to develop their own neighborhood plan. This master plan can clarify the vision, policy objectives, and issues within a neighborhood, and it can also serve as another means for neighborhoods to remain organized. A neighborhood plan should be consistent in format to its parent sector chapter as well as to the general policies and strategies outlined for the sector. A neighborhood plan should help implement the strategies recommended for the sector, with a higher level of detail focused on accomplishing the neighborhood's overall objectives.

A successful neighborhood plan should address the following topics as they pertain to the area, as well as list the opportunities and challenges for the neighborhood, the general policies addressing their vision, and the specific actions needed to begin implementing their policy objectives. The comprehensive plan topic areas include:

- Community Design
- Natural Environment and Open Space
- Parks and Recreation
- Greenways
- Historic Preservation
- Economic Development
- Information Technology
- Utilities
- Transportation
- Public Safety
- Government Relations
- Community Facilities
- Neighborhood Planning

Neighborhood plans may be submitted by a neighborhood's representatives to the Planning Commission for consideration. If approved by the Commission and Town Council, the plan will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan as a supplement to the applicable sector chapter. Neighborhood representatives should work closely with Town staff and the Planning Commission to correlate

their plan with the Comprehensive Plan and to work through difficult issues and inconsistencies between and within plans.

Since each of the town's nine sectors encompasses multiple neighborhoods, a neighborhood plan should be consistent with its sector's vision. If a neighborhood's goals differ from those outlined for the sector and are supported by Town Council, then the relevant sector chapter should be amended prior to the adoption of the neighborhood plan. The creation of the neighborhood plan can help focus a neighborhood and ensure that its goals are a permanent part of the town's planning process.

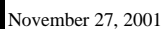


Figure NP-2, Neighborhood Planning Areas

Code Enforcement

The Town of Blacksburg is committed to enforcing Town codes to improve the quality of life within neighborhoods. Active enforcement of these codes is necessary to ensure a stable living environment throughout Town. This initiative of the Neighborhood Enhancement Program (NEP) is designed to streamline the existing complaint process and to initiate proactive identification of violations to reduce concerns reported by citizens. The NEP Coordinator serves as the contact person for citizens, assigns issues to appropriate staff, tracks the progress of each case, and relates that information back to concerned residents.

This NEP initiative, like neighborhood planning, is town-wide and not limited to a particular planning or zoning district. This enforcement program focuses on the exterior maintenance of both owner-occupied and rental properties. The primary objectives are to:

- Eliminate code violations which degrade the appearance and quality of life within neighborhoods and affect the public health, safety, or welfare of the occupants;
- Address recurring violations in a proactive and timely manner;
- Encourage communication between neighbors on individual or mutual concerns as a first approach to problem solving.

The majority of reported issues involve litter and debris, tall grass, inoperable vehicles, housing over-occupancy, incorrectly identified houses and other nuisances. When information is received the process for enforcing the code is:

1. Document the complaint and check for other cases being investigated at the same location.
2. The property is inspected and, if a violation exists, the inspector contacts the resident in-person or leaves a written notice.
3. The complainant is contacted and a case file for any violations is initiated.
4. The property is re-inspected in five days.
5. If the violation persists, a written notice is sent to the owner and any other responsible parties, such as tenants and property managers.
6. The property is rechecked at the end of the written notice's time frame.
7. When applicable, the town uses a contractor to abate the nuisance, the inspector checks the contractor's work, and the owner is billed.
8. For continued zoning or other violations, the case is referred to the Town Attorney for further action.

This enforcement initiative educates residents on Town codes and encourages citizen involvement in problem solving and making the first contact with their neighbors. Town code enforcement will not provide the long-term solution that residents desire without neighbor-to-neighbor communication and involvement. In most cases, violations are resolved more effectively when a neighbor, or neighborhood organization, communicates a concern directly to an individual.

Rental Permitting

Proper maintenance of a dwelling unit should not depend on whether it is tenant or owner-occupied. In many instances once owner-occupied housing converts to rental use, the maintenance of the property is neglected. The degradation of one property within a neighborhood can cause a domino effect as adjacent owners and tenants become less inclined to invest their time and money toward the upkeep of their properties. Poor maintenance of rental properties has a detrimental effect on the quality of life throughout a neighborhood.

The primary focus of the Rental Permitting initiative is to reverse these past trends associated with rental property conversions. The objectives of this program include:

- Improve substandard, unsafe housing;
- Improve landlord awareness of occupancy limits set forth in the Town Zoning Ordinance;
- Maintain tenant/landlord responsibility to the neighborhood upon conversion of a property to rental use;
- Establish a database for contact information on rental properties.

Rental properties within low density, single-family (R-4) zoning districts and the single-family portions of planned residential (PR) areas are required to register annually with the town. The R-4 and PR districts were chosen as the pilot areas for the rental permitting program because of traditionally high percentages of owner-occupied housing and recent increases in rental use. Initially limiting program registration to these areas allows the town to evaluate the effectiveness of the program while addressing concerns associated with rental properties in the most sensitive single-family neighborhoods.

Rental registration includes property address, owner and manager contact information, and occupancy verification. 480 rental properties were registered in the R-4 and PR zoning districts in the year 2000. Registered rental properties are placed on a three-year inspection cycle. Inspections are conducted under the property maintenance provisions of the State Building Code. This ensures that there are no outstanding maintenance issues with the rental property that could

jeopardize the public health, safety, and welfare of the occupants. Rental property owners are given a one-time “pass” to proactively make necessary repairs prior to the initial inspection. Properties that do not meet state guidelines at the initial inspection are provided a detailed list of items to repair and a re-inspection is scheduled within 90 days.

Rental registration and inspections are effective tools in building landlord awareness of the condition of their properties and State Building Code requirements. It also enhances contact with the individuals responsible for maintaining the rental properties. This initiative improves the quality of rental housing through inspections, communication, and education.

Rental Permitting Districts

0 .5 mi. 1 mi.

Planned Residential (PR)

Low Density Residential (R-4)

Town of Blacksburg

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November 27, 2001

November 27, 2001
Blacksburg 2046

HOUSING

Virginia Tech influences every aspect of the Blacksburg community, but housing is the most notable. Virginia Tech had a year 2000 enrollment of 25,783 students, including 8,700 on-campus residents, and approximately 16,000 off-campus residents. Any increase in university enrollment without the construction of new residence halls will promote an increase in rental housing stock in Town. Nearly 70 percent of all dwelling units in Blacksburg are rented, which is a much higher proportion of the housing stock than in the neighboring communities of Montgomery County, Christiansburg, and Radford. The university does not currently plan to increase the number of on-campus dormitories, which poses a challenge to the town in many ways. While their presence off-campus adds significant revenue to the local economy, students often find their lifestyles in conflict with those of non-student residents. Large numbers of students living off-campus increases housing densities in some neighborhoods, adds to pedestrian and vehicular traffic congestion, and creates pressure on the housing market. Student demand and the relatively high incomes of university faculty create an inflated housing market. At \$48,671, Blacksburg's median family income is only 11 to 14 percent above neighboring communities; however, the average assessed house value is \$136,155 or 45 percent higher than the county's assessed house value of \$93,813 (See *Figure CD-3*).

Blacksburg Housing by Percent Renter-Occupied and Percent Owner-Occupied				
Housing by Tenure	1980	1990	2000	Housing Added 1990-2000* Building Permits
Percent Rental Housing Units	66.3%	68.5%	69.6%	47.85%
Percent Owner-Occupied Housing	33.7%	31.5%	30.4%	52.15%
Total Housing Units	9,088	11,906	13,134	1,228
* Data is from building permits, which do not indicate whether housing unit will be rented or owner-occupied. Figures indicate multi-family units and single-family units. Single-family includes townhouses as attached single-family.				

Figure NP-4, Blacksburg Housing by Percent Renter-Occupied and Percent Owner-Occupied

Variety of Housing Styles in Blacksburg – 2000		
Number of Units in Occupied Structure	Total Number of Units	Percent of Housing Stock
Single-family detached	3,827	28.3%
Townhouses and duplexes	899	6.6%
Apartments	8,007	59.2%
Mobile home	445	3.3%
Other (Group housing, houseboats, railroad cars, campers, vans, tents, etc.)	345	2.6%

Figure NP-5, Variety of Housing Styles in Blacksburg - 2000

Owner Occupancy by Neighborhood Planning District

0 .5 mi. 1 mi.

November 27, 2001

Town of Blacksburg
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November 27, 2001
Blacksburg 2046

Affordability

Certain assumptions must be made when looking at housing affordability. Traditionally, buyers can obtain a mortgage for roughly two and one-half to three times their gross annual income. The resulting monthly mortgage payment then consumes up to one-third of their monthly income, depending on the terms of the loan. Median adjusted gross income for an area (half of the residents earn more and half earn less) is commonly compared to the average selling price to gauge affordability of housing to the local community. The 2000 Census indicates that the median value of an owner occupied unit in Blacksburg is \$144,000¹. However, the average sales price for a single family house on a ¼ acre lot was \$186,521 and the average sales price for any dwelling unit (e.g., condominium, townhouse, or house) in Town was \$118,540. By comparison, the annual median income for families for the town was reported to be \$51,810¹. This family income would typically qualify applicants to purchase a home between \$129,525 and \$155,430 with a conventional mortgage.

These generalizations suggest that in 2000, the average cost of a single-family style house in Blacksburg was unaffordable for more than half of the families.¹ Duplexes and townhouses, however, were affordable. Between 1995 and 2000, the majority of dwellings in an affordable price range (under \$130,000) were townhouses. Most of these townhouses were subsequently rented to students. According to local realtors, starter homes in Blacksburg are in short supply, and the few houses priced \$105,000 to \$130,000 quickly sold. In Montgomery County, the average sales price for a single family home, during the same period, was \$156,439. Although the average sales price for houses in Montgomery County is lower it is also outside the affordable range of \$129,525 to \$155,430. This indicates that young families and professionals are finding more housing opportunities outside of the Town.

Blacksburg Owner-Occupied Housing Values 1980 - 2000			
	1980	1990	2000
Median Owner-Occupied House Value	\$60,700	\$93,100	\$144,000
Median Family Income	\$19,202	\$35,617	\$51,810
Income to House Value Ratio	3.16	2.61	2.78

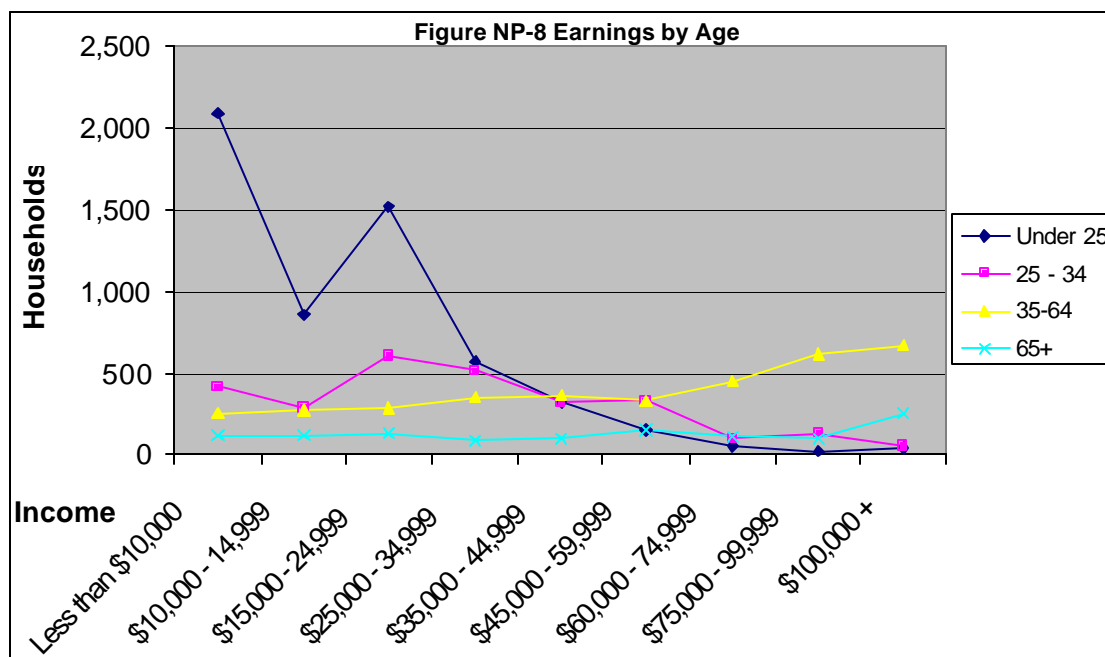
Figure NP-7, Blacksburg Owner-Occupied Housing Values 1980 - 2000

The ratio of median family income to median house value has remained relatively consistent between 1980 and 2000, as indicated in *figure NP-7*. This has stayed within the acceptable 2.5 – 3.0 ratio of house value vs. family income. However, this ratio can be expected to

¹2000 US Census, Bureau of the Census.

increase relative to family income as population increases and developable land within Town decreases. The Multiple Listing Service information shows that for the year 2000 the average sales price for a new single-family detached house in Blacksburg was \$221,913. This is 19% percent more than the average sales price of single-family housing and \$66,483 more than the median family can afford to pay for a house. Although the year 2000 new construction is only a small percentage of Blacksburg's total housing stock, it is indicative of the development trend in Town to build either high-valued single family houses or multi-unit apartments for students.

The average rent for an apartment in 2000 was \$641 per month². Assuming this represents one-third to one-fourth of a household's monthly expenditures, the household would need to earn between \$1,923 and \$2,564 per month (or \$23,076 to \$30,768 a year) to rent such an apartment. In 2000, median family income was \$51,810; this indicates that rental housing is affordable to many citizens. However, newly built apartments and townhouses typically rent for \$1000 to \$1500 per month which, depending on the rental unit, would require an annual salary between \$36,000 - \$72,000. This places new rental housing at or above the limit of what a median income family can afford. As such, these newer rental units are typically designed for and rented to college students.



2000 Census, Bureau of the Census

² New River Apartment Council.

Income statistics, such as median family income, can be misleading due to Blacksburg's population. Households under 25 years of age account for 42.7% of Blacksburg's residents, many of these households earn less than \$10,000 a year. This age group is mostly composed of students that have minimal work incomes. These students typically have their incomes supplemented through loans or financial aid from their family. This aid, and the inclination to split rent between others, allows most students to afford housing at high rents. In addition, the presence of the university has attracted many higher-income jobs. There are 2,606 Households that earn more than \$60,000 a year. This comprises 19.8% of Blacksburg's households.

These factors have created a housing market that caters to the needs of low-income students and upper-income residents. The housing market is generally not designing or building new housing for middle-income residents. *Figure NP-8* illustrates that there are 2,624 households (20% of Blacksburg households) that earn between \$25,000 and \$45,000 a year. These are low to moderate income working families whose housing needs are not being served by the current market. This untapped market includes 30% of the 25-34 age-group of young families that are typically attracted to Blacksburg's high-tech industry and university orientation. New developments must provide a variety of housing styles to meet the demand for this age group and income level. If not, young professionals and families will not be able to find adequate housing within the Town.

Off-campus Student Housing

Multi-family Housing

With more than 16,000 students living off-campus within Town, there is a high demand for rental dwellings. As of the year 2000 there were 8,007 apartment units with 18,178 bedrooms. These apartment complexes house the majority of the town's



Figure NP-9, Apartment Complex

off-campus student population and provide affordable housing to some non-student residents. Lifestyle differences exist between student and non-student residents due to the concentration of college-aged adults in these complexes. Apartment buildings should use appropriate buffers, landscaping, adequate lighting, and screened trash areas to minimize these lifestyle conflicts. In addition, apartment buildings should not be located within low-density single-family residential areas. Apartment complexes should be located adjacent to a collector road, transit route, trail system, and have clustered buildings when proposed for medium-density residential areas. These characteristics allow for the maximum amount of recreational space and areas of open space between the high-density multi-family residential land use and surrounding land uses.

Rental of Single-Family Houses

Although many college students seek to live in on-campus dormitories or apartments, there are a large and growing number of students that find rental accommodations in single-family neighborhoods throughout Town. These houses offer competitive rental rates to students, different living conditions, and are in some instances more conveniently located to the university campus and to town amenities than apartments. The residential neighborhoods adjacent to the downtown area and university campus are particularly attractive to students, and subsequently have higher renter occupancy. One of the greatest concerns of community residents is a decline in property maintenance that often occurs as the number of rental properties gradually increases in traditionally owner-occupied neighborhoods. Landlords sometimes fail to take responsibility for properties and make necessary repairs. A student occupant's active lifestyle can also lend to a decline in the general appearance of the neighborhood. If left unchecked this deterioration could threaten the health, safety, and welfare of the occupants. In addition, many resident owners are concerned about the over-occupancy of rental properties and a variety of nuisance issues.

There will always be a segment of the student population that will seek housing in single-family houses regardless of the supply of apartments or other dwellings in Town. Ensuring that properties are inspected on a regular basis, and that property owners and managers are kept informed of issues and take responsibility for the condition of their properties, can minimize possible negative impacts.

Greek Housing

The issue of off-campus fraternities and sororities is one that the Blacksburg community has wrestled with for decades. Currently, there are 27 fraternities and 13 sororities recognized by Virginia Tech. Ten organizations are located on campus, in special purpose



Figure NP-10, Off-campus Greek Housing

housing constructed by the university. Approximately 20 Greek organization houses are located off-campus, largely scattered throughout Town in the midst of residential neighborhoods and commercial areas. Zoning in Town restricts the location of Greek houses with the intention of encouraging all of them to relocate onto the Virginia Tech campus, but Greek use of these structures predates this zoning ordinance. State code allows for the current off-campus Greek houses to continue to be used as fraternities and sororities, despite a change in zoning or ownership, as long as the use is not discontinued for more than two years. The demand for these "grandfathered" houses far exceeds the supply.

In response to community concerns, the Long Range Planning Committee of the Planning Commission formed a study group in 1993 -- the Greek Housing Subcommittee. Their report was submitted to the Planning Commission in November 1994. The recommendations consisted

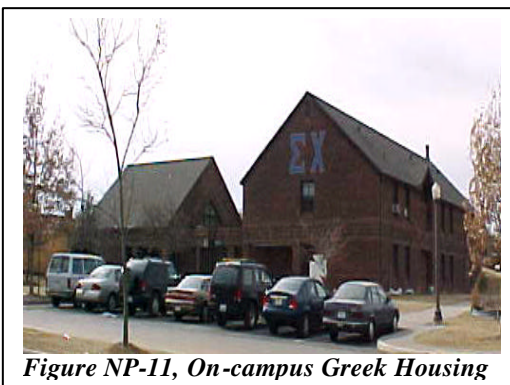


Figure NP-11, On-campus Greek Housing

of short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions to be implemented in partnership with the town, the university, and the student members of the off-campus fraternities and sororities. Short-term strategies addressed improved building maintenance and better behavior, as well

as positive contributions by fraternity and sorority members to the Blacksburg community. Medium-term measures included the development of zoning provisions to enable the location of Greek houses in specific areas in exchange for certain conditions and distinct expectations for neighborhood relations. The long-term recommendations included that an area be planned to accommodate future Greek houses, in an appropriate setting, clustered and remote from established neighborhoods. This area would enable the relocation of scattered Greek houses from inappropriate locations. In conjunction with Town efforts, Virginia Tech's Master Plan proposes to accommodate a total of 25 Greek houses on campus. Ten houses currently exist; eight are under construction and seven more are planned for construction over the next ten years. These houses will accommodate roughly 50 percent of the demand for special purpose housing. The town supports this plan and would like to see even more capacity created on-campus for Greek housing.

Since this study was adopted into the town's comprehensive plan in 1996, many short-term goals have been accomplished, although primarily through the implementation of the Neighborhood Enhancement Program. The special zoning overlays have not encouraged the relocation of any Greek houses to those areas. The relocation of all special purpose housing onto university property would facilitate a more stable relationship between the Greek system and other citizens of the town.



Figure NP-12, Special Housing

Opportunities

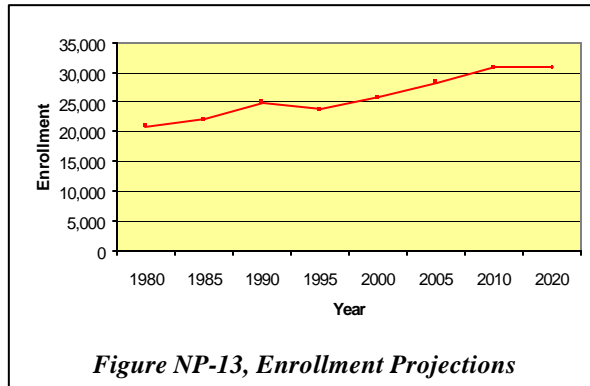
- ◆ A beautiful setting and a pleasant, clean environment provide an attractive place to live.
- ◆ A variety of housing types and values are available.
- ◆ Generally, newer housing translates into lower maintenance problems.
- ◆ A high resale value for houses makes home-ownership a good investment.
- ◆ Blacksburg's residents are attracted by a good quality of life -- low crime, minimal congestion, clean air, and pleasant neighbors.
- ◆ Blacksburg has several grassroots neighborhood organizations coordinated by the Neighborhood Federation, an all-volunteer group of neighborhood leaders.

Challenges

- ◆ The high cost of housing compared to surrounding jurisdictions has led to a shortage of homes for young professionals, middle-income families, and “empty-nesters”.
- ◆ Lifestyle conflicts between students and non-students, particularly in neighborhoods immediately surrounding University areas, create tension.
- ◆ Loud noise emanating from both dwellings and moving vehicles late at night is a difficult issue to address due to manpower constraints at critical times and public confusion concerning the enforcement of noise violations.
- ◆ Poor maintenance of some housing in the downtown residential areas, especially among older renter-occupied units, as well as in some rural pockets.
- ◆ Approximately 62 percent of the town's population of 39,573 are students, 16,000 of them are students living in Town and off-campus. This population is often transient, stays four to six years or less, and generally has minimal involvement in the greater community.
- ◆ The initial success of the Neighborhood Enhancement Program has caused a corresponding increase in expectations from the general public. Meeting these higher expectations may be beyond the resource capability of the town in the short-term.

What is Changing

In order to become a top 30 research university, Virginia Tech may add up to 5,000 graduate students to their enrollment over the next ten years. In Blacksburg, the number of housing units increases in



proportion to increases in enrollment at Virginia Tech. In 1980 enrollment was 20,780 with 8,479 students living in residence halls. The number of housing units in Town that year totaled 9,785. In 1990, the enrollment figure had grown by 20 percent to 24,926 with 8,100 students living on-campus. Likewise, the number of housing units increased nearly 22 percent to 11,906. By 2000, the university's enrollment had leveled off at 25,700 with 8,700 students living on-campus. No increase in on-campus undergraduate residential space is planned. Additionally, the university is planning to provide only 125 additional rooms for graduate housing with the conversion of the Donaldson Brown Center to graduate housing.

In September 1995, the Blacksburg Apartment Council reported an occupancy rate of 99 percent. This is a strong indication that additional housing will be needed to accommodate any increase in enrollment. Traditionally increases in Virginia Tech enrollment have caused an increase in the town population equal to 1.5 individuals for every new student. This may result in the need for as many as 7,500 new bedrooms to accommodate the projected increase in Virginia Tech's enrollment.

Comparison of Virginia Tech Enrollment Growth and Growth in Blacksburg Housing Units				
	Blacksburg Population	# Housing Units	Virginia Tech Enrollment	Students Living in Residence Halls
Year 1980	30,638	9,785	20,780	8,413
Percent change	+12.9%	+21.8%	+19.9%	-(1%)
Year 1990	34,658	11,906	24,926	8,100
Percent change	+14.2%	+9.3%	+3.4%	+7.6%
Year 2000	39,573	13,134	25,783	8,718

Figure NP-14, Comparison of Virginia Tech Enrollment Growth and Growth in Blacksburg Housing Units

There is a trend toward more expensive housing, both owner-occupied and rental. This is mainly due to the demand put on the local housing supply by a relatively affluent population, and partly due to higher land and development costs in Blacksburg (see the Residential Development Cost Comparison table in the *Community Development* chapter, *Figure CD-3*). This trend will only increase as developable land becomes scarcer and demand increases with the growth in population, unless specific housing policies are adopted to provide for a variety of housing styles for all income ranges. The town is not eligible for any federal or state assistance in providing affordable housing, nor is it allowed to implement any income targeted housing policies under state code since it is located in a county with under 85,000, but not over 90,000 persons. The town will continue to explore funding and policy options and may be able to take advantage of a new federal land use designation – the micropolitan area. The town is investigating whether funding, or other legislation that may be associated with these areas, will be available, or if the town or county will qualify under this new designation.

The neighborhoods surrounding the Virginia Tech campus will experience increasing concentrations of resident students as the university's enrollment increases and students seek housing off-campus, primarily along bus routes or within walking distance of campus. In the short-term this could lead to increases in lifestyle conflicts between students and non-student residents, resulting in some non-student families moving out of the neighborhoods.

The Zoning Ordinance was changed in 1997 to determine housing density for apartment buildings by the number of bedrooms, not dwelling units. This change occurred to discourage the construction of a large number of apartments with four bedrooms per unit. The previous zoning ordinance allowed for the construction of higher-density dwellings, thereby increasing the potential for lifestyle conflicts and vehicle/pedestrian traffic congestion throughout Town.

With the large amount of pedestrian traffic near central Blacksburg and the proximity to Virginia Tech, there is an increasing trend for conversion of residential structures near downtown to commercial or office use. The large market of pedestrian students nearby provides opportunities for additional retail establishments. The nearness of the university itself will provide markets for bed and breakfast establishments, university offices, nonprofit organizations, and other professional offices doing business with the university. As residential neighborhoods become less attractive for single-family occupancy, conversions of existing structures to other uses will occur. Maintaining

the character of neighborhoods will become difficult as residential houses convert to commercial uses if owners alter the buildings in a manner detrimental to their surroundings. Some professional office uses that operate at a low intensity are suitable for locating in residential structures that border downtown commercial areas.

GENERAL POLICIES

- ❑ Preserve and enhance the integrity and quality of existing residential neighborhoods.
- ❑ Provide an appropriate mix of housing styles and choices, allowing for different types of housing from neighborhood to neighborhood.
- ❑ Increase the availability of affordable single-family houses.
- ❑ Increase the number of housing units attractive to and suitable for retired people.
- ❑ Eliminate substandard housing in Blacksburg.
- ❑ Reduce the suburbanization of ridgelines.

ACTION STRATEGIES

in general

- Encourage developers to work extensively with surrounding neighborhood residents to resolve community concerns prior to formalizing development plans.
- For retirement housing, public transportation and community services should be located within a reasonable walking distance and should be accessible via paved walkways that are lighted, secure, and well maintained. If neither public transportation nor community services are located within a short walking distance (i.e. a 5-7 minute walk), the retirement housing development should provide shuttle bus service.
- The topography of the site and the land between the site and nearby destinations should be taken into consideration when siting residential development for retirees. Pedestrian facilities should not be located on slopes greater than five to eight percent, and such maximum slopes should not be continuous for more than 75 feet.
- The architecture and site design for multifamily residential developments should incorporate features that reduce the potential for crime and enhance the security of residents.

- Permit high-density housing only where direct access is available to streets or highways capable of carrying the traffic that these higher densities will generate.
- Provide adequate notice to neighborhood representatives regarding formal proposals for new development and redevelopment that would impact existing residential neighborhoods.
- Allow small commercial development within residential communities only when the commercial uses are designed to serve the neighborhood and the intensity, scale, and building design are compatible with surrounding residential uses.
- Promote the dual use of residential buildings that are converting to business space to allow for residential space in those structures to help maintain the residential character of the neighborhood.
- Encourage new infill development in established areas that is compatible with existing and/or planned land use, that is at a compatible scale with the surrounding area, and that can be supported by adequate public facilities and transportation systems.
- Stabilize residential neighborhoods adjacent to commercial areas through the establishment of transitional land uses, the control of vehicular access, and vegetative buffers and/or architectural screens.
- Utilize landscaping and open space along rights-of-way to minimize the impacts of incompatible land uses separated by roadways.
- Regulate the amount of noise and light produced by nonresidential land uses to minimize impacts on nearby residential properties.
- Encourage housing as a development option for infill sites, particularly in commercial areas, near the university and near employment concentrations to reduce travel to classes and work.
- Work in partnership with Virginia Tech to address special housing needs. An attractive alternative for both the town and Greek community is additional on-campus housing for fraternities/sororities.
- Use cluster development as a means to enhance the natural environment and for the preservation of open space when the smaller lot sizes permitted would complement surrounding development.
- Enhance the effectiveness of the existing Neighborhood Federation with staff support, initially provided by the town to facilitate neighborhood enhancements, to strengthen community involvement, and to provide coordination with Town government.

- Upgrade substandard housing and improve physical community facilities (e.g., streets, sidewalks, and lighting) in existing neighborhoods.
- Enforce the Town Code to ensure decent, safe, and sanitary housing among rental units, and to prevent and deter noise, litter, occupancy, speeding, and other violations.
- Convene an annual townwide forum of all neighborhood groups to share ideas and coordinate efforts.
- Achieve compatible transitions between adjoining land uses through the control of height, yard requirements, and appropriate buffering and screening.

within 5 years

- Design specific traffic circulation systems to reduce speeding, commuter or cut through traffic, or other conflicts in street use and character in residential neighborhoods.
- Offer density bonuses to developers who will devote a percentage of their residential developments to affordable housing.
- Invite suggestions from developers and citizens to streamline and improve development regulations.
- Create incentives for developers to build more small apartments that are affordable and attractive to married students, young professionals, and retirees.
- Establish a conflict resolution committee comprised of Virginia Tech administrators, town resident students, year-round neighborhood residents, landlords, and town staff to coordinate resolution of conflicts between students and non-student town residents in neighborhoods close to campus.
- Establish a local tenants union, possibly in conjunction with the Virginia Tech Student Government Association, to assist in educating landlords and tenants about various housing issues, to document and verify complaints, to provide mediation services, and to refer serious complaints to appropriate legal or regulatory services.
- Establish voluntary architectural guidelines for new or renovated housing in existing neighborhoods.
- Provide community education classes or seminars (perhaps through the YMCA or other civic organizations) to convey issues of town government, planning, citizens' rights, and responsibilities.

- Develop a citizen's planning academy for neighborhood representatives and other interested parties to increase the understanding of local planning methods and government processes, and to aid in the citizen development of neighborhood master plans.
- Consider the expansion of the Rental Permitting Program into additional areas of Town as resources allow (e.g., Transitional Residential and Mixed-use areas).
- Consider the expansion of residential permit parking in areas where parking is limited or otherwise a nuisance (e.g., the Apperson, Dickerson, and Murphy neighborhoods adjacent to the high school).
- Adopt guidelines for residential development for retirees.
- Inventory all neighborhoods and housing in Blacksburg to determine areas of substandard conditions. Research the availability of federal and state funding sources to assist with housing and neighborhood improvements.
- Zone appropriate areas for cluster houses or zero-lot-line houses to meet demand for affordable housing, retirement, or other housing needs.
- Develop zoning and subdivision regulations that will restrict development of mountain ridgelines. Establish a policy not to extend town water and sewer to areas where development might result in ridgeline development and loss of tree cover.
- In sensitive areas such as ridgelines, steep slopes, wetlands, and flood-prone areas, establish zoning provisions for conservation/greenway easements.

within 25 years

- Support a variety of neighborhood types such as rural hamlet, suburb, planned fraternal residential, neotraditional, urban, and mixed use.
- Evaluate the cost of each development standard to ensure the benefits received by the community are worth the added development cost.
- Seek state enabling legislation for mandatory transferable development rights as a means of protecting low-density neighborhoods, historic structures, and undeveloped properties.
- Encourage employer-assisted housing programs to help lower- and moderate-income employees in buying houses.

- Encourage the redevelopment of existing manufactured home parks as affordable housing areas that incorporate modern site planning and residential amenities.
- The management and owners of manufactured home parks should continue to improve property maintenance, eliminate occupancy violations, upgrade substandard housing, and improve physical community facilities (e.g., streets, sidewalks/trails, lighting).
- Look for examples from other communities and the building profession to develop prototype low-cost housing unit designs that would be acceptable in established neighborhoods and new subdivisions.
- Develop neighborhood plans for each neighborhood planning area, with coordination of residents and the Neighborhood Federation.